

Grace, Faith and Works (part 4 of 4): "Faith Alone" and the Bible

Description: The relationship between inner faith and good deeds in Islam. Part Four: A look into the Bible in search for the concept of "Faith Alone".

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Belief of "Faith Alone" Rejected by the Bible

Christians believe that human beings must attain Justification before they enter Heaven. Western Christians claim that they attain this Justification simply by "faith alone". Yet, this doctrine of "faith alone" is rejected in the Bible itself. It is interesting to note that the word "faith" appears over two hundred times in the New Testament, and only *once* is it coupled with the word "alone." And this one time that the two words appear together, the doctrine is actually rejected outright:

"You see that a person is justified by his works and not by faith alone." (James 2:24)

Indeed, the passage in its entirety seems to negate the doctrine of "faith alone". We read in James, 2:14-18:

14. "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"

15. Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

16. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

17. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

18. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." (James 2:14-18)

Even Satan had the belief in God, yet he did not back this up with his oath of allegiance nor with his works. The Bible continues:

19. "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

20. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

21. Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

22. You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

23. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

24. You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

24. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

(James 2:19-26)

Some Christians claim that it is enough to declare Jesus as one's savior and God, after which a person is "re-born." They believe that this one-time experience of declaring Jesus as one's savior is enough for one to be reassured entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Yet, such a concept is rejected by the Bible itself; verse 7:21 of Matthew tells us that merely declaring one's Lord as Jesus is not enough, but rather one has to obey God's Commands to reach Salvation:

"Not everyone who says to me: "Lord, Lord", will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

God will give to each man commensurate to whatever he has earned with his own two hands (i.e. works). Eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven can only be achieved by persistence in doing good deeds; we read from the Bible:

"God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give Eternal Life." (Romans 2:6-7)

Therefore, Eternal Life is *contingent* upon doing good. The Bible says that those who do good (i.e. good deeds) will reach Heaven, and those who do evil (i.e. evil deeds) will enter Hell:

"...Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." (John 5:29)

Salvation is not achieved overnight as some Christians believe, but rather it is something which must be worked for throughout life, as the Bible says:

"...Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..." (Philippians 2:12)

The Bible says further:

"But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matthew 24:13)

In the Bible, Jesus, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, is reported to have said that in order to enter the Heavenly Life, one must obey God's Commandments. This is a clear indication that faith alone is not enough to attain Salvation, but rather

entrance into the Heavenly Life is dependent on obeying God's Commandments. The Bible says:

Jesus replied: "...If you want to enter Life, obey the Commandments!" (Matthew 19:17)

The Danger of "Faith Alone" Doctrine

There is a great danger in preaching a doctrine which trivializes the importance of deeds. Oftentimes, many Christians think that because Jesus absolved them of their sins, there is thus no need to stay away from sinful lifestyles. In other words, Jesus has given them a "free pass" to sin. And that is why we find that many Christians will sin throughout the week and come to church only on Sundays, content in the idea that they have been saved no matter what. The doctrine of "once saved, always saved" leads to negligence in one's duties to God. A religion which preaches such a belief is only causing its followers to stray from righteousness. The religion of Islam, meanwhile, warns its followers that God's Grace is reached by belief **and** good deeds, and that one must strive to attain Paradise. This is why Muslims pray five times a day, so that they can attain God's Grace and Salvation; it is a constant struggle towards righteousness over the course of one's entire life, not merely a one-time event.

The doctrine of faith alone is blasphemous because it was not taught to us by God Almighty; "faith alone" is not found in the Quran. For that matter, the doctrine cannot even be found in the Bible. It is not proper to follow a belief which finds no scriptural basis whatsoever.

Conclusion

Salvation is reached by attaining the Grace of God, and this is done by both inner faith and good deeds. This is a belief which finds support both in the Quran and the Bible. God's Promise is that Grace is attained through "inner faith" and "good deeds", in contrast to "faith alone".

Some people may believe that they are promised Heaven by "faith alone", yet does this mean that they will *actually* enter Heaven? Merely believing in something does not make it into a reality. How often do we turn on the television and listen to televangelists claiming that we can be saved simply by pronouncing Jesus as our Lord? Often we can flip the channel only to see someone else promising us that we can lose fifty pounds in one month simply by strapping some exercise belt to the belly. Is this promise any less doubtful than the televangelist's promise of Heaven?

How foolish would a person be to buy one of those exercise belts and to rely solely on it, without worrying about one's own works (i.e. diet, exercise, etc)? Such a person—if he becomes careless with his diet and exercise—would eventually clog his arteries with fat and die of a heart attack, regardless of his inner belief that he was to lose fifty pounds. The Islamic belief is that sins are black specks on the spiritual heart; with enough sins, the entire heart will be covered in blackness and will die. Sins clog the spiritual heart like fat clogs the arteries of the physical heart. The one who presents a blackened heart

to God will not enter Heaven, regardless of his belief in the concept of "faith alone". A person who relies on this belief is like the one who puts his trust in the exercise belt: for a time, such people will feel deluded and content in the promise, but, eventually, reality will bare its ugly head, and all men will be held accountable for their works.

A magical exercise belt causes people to become negligent towards diet and exercise, because they believe that the belt will more than compensate for their lack. Likewise, the concept of "faith alone" causes people to be negligent towards works. When such people die, they will be upset that they did not spend their lives accruing good deeds in order to gain God's Grace. People should spend their lives doing good deeds, instead of buying into the promise of an effortless ride into Paradise on unfulfilled intentions.

The Quran confirms the truth, instead of contenting us with fallacies: men must work hard in order to attain Paradise. It is common sense that such a great reward should demand great effort. God Almighty says:

"And strive hard in the Way of God, such a striving as is due to Him!" (Quran 22:78)

And God says:

"And those who strive hard in Our Cause, We will certainly guide them to our Ways: For verily God is with those who do right." (Quran 61:11)

We must strive to seek God's Pleasure by not only believing in our hearts but by showing it with our actions. Nothing is more important than belief in the heart, yet this does not negate the importance of actions of the limbs. Works without faith is insincere; faith without works is hypocrisy.

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